

Parker Bear Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project 1

Final Decision and Decision Rationale for Parker Bear Late Successional
Reserve Enhancement Project 1

Environmental Assessment Number OR080-04-18

July 2007

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Oregon State Office
Salem District
Marys Peak Resource Area

Township 12 South, Range 7 West, Sections 29; 32 and 33 and Township 13
South, Range 7 West, Section 5; Willamette Meridian
Benton County, Oregon

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BLM/OR/WA/PL-07/055+1792

I. Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis for the Parker Bear LSR (Late Successional Reserve) Enhancement Project 1, which is documented in the *Parker Bear Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Environmental Assessment* (EA# OR080-04-18) and the associated project file. The proposed action is to thin 40-70 year old mixed conifer stands on 247 acres within LSR and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations (LUA's). A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed on June 16, 2005 and the EA and FONSI were then made available for public review.

The decision documented in this Decision Rationale (DR) is based on the analysis documented in the EA. This decision authorizes the implementation of only those activities directly related to and included within the timber sale.

II. Decision

I have decided to implement Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 as described in the proposed action (EA pp. 12-17) with modifications described below, hereafter referred to as the "selected action". The selected action is shown on the maps attached to this Decision Rationale. This decision is based on site-specific analysis in the *Parker Bear Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Environmental Assessment* (EA # OR080-04-18), the supporting project record, management recommendations contained in the *North Fork Alsea River Watershed Analysis* (7/96), as well as the management direction contained in the Salem District Resource Management Plan (May 1995), which are incorporated by reference in the EA.

The following is a summary of this decision.

Changes to the Project Design Features/Mitigation Measures

Since the release of the EA, the IDT has identified the need to update some information after further analysis.

1. Enhancement of wildlife habitat components:

The EA included the following design feature (pg. 16)

- Within the density management areas any green trees intended to be part of the residual stand that are incidentally felled to facilitate access and operability (yarding corridors, hang-ups, tailholds) would be treated as follows:
 - Trees that are 20 inches Diameter Breast Height Outside Bark (DBHOB) or greater would be retained on site.
 - Trees less than 20 inches DBHOB would be available for removal.

This Decision Record changes the above design standard as follows:

- At least 2 green trees/acre intended to be part of the residual stand would be felled/girdled/topped to function as CWD at the completion of harvest operations. Trees to be utilized for CWD creation would be stand average diameter breast height outside bark (DBHOB) or larger.

- Incidentally felled or topped trees (ie. tailtrees, intermediate supports, guyline anchors, hang-ups, etc.) that are left by harvest operations would be counted toward this target. If such incidentally felled trees are removed/sold, additional trees would be felled/girdled/topped to meet this target on a per treatment unit basis.

Salem BLM's accumulated experience with administering density management harvests suggests that the number of trees felled to facilitate access and operability ranges from 1 to 3 trees per acre. The revised design feature for incidentally felled trees allows for more administrative flexibility while meeting a desired input of fresh coarse woody debris for immediate enhancement of ecological processes. No significant difference is anticipated in the amount of or size of incidentally felled trees remaining in the density management units upon completion of harvest operations.

2 Stand Treatment of Density Management:

- Total density management area is 247 acres, a 59 acre decrease from the 306 acres described in the EA (see Table 2). Forty to 70 year old mixed-conifer stands will be thinned to a variable density (trees per acre ranging from 44 to 99). Generally, the largest trees will be left. Average canopy closure will be no less than 40 percent after harvest.
- A portion of the decrease in density management acres is due to providing additional safety precautions adjacent to powerlines (reserving all trees that could fall within 15 feet of the powerline) than originally considered.
- Following additional reconnaissance, some density management areas were found that would have been operationally difficult to harvest (steep road cutbanks in conjunction with inadequate guyline anchors and the inability to achieve one-end suspension during yarding operations) and were excluded from treatment.
- Some areas were deferred due to small patches of recent blowdown while additional areas were deferred due to portions of Unit 29A being within a proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and being inaccessible due to the elimination of 500 feet of road renovation.

3 Harvest

- Ground based yarding will take place on 25 acres, a four acre decrease from the 29 acres of ground based logging described in the EA. This decrease is due to less acres being identified suitable for ground based yarding than previously expected after extensive ground surveys.
- Cable or skyline yarding will take place on 222 acres, a 55 acre decrease from the 277 acres of cable/ skyline logging described in the EA.
- Multiple pass tractor roads will use existing skid roads, where possible.
- Approximately 2 skyline yarding roads will occur outside the boundary of Unit 32C. The area in which yarding will occur was originally within the boundary of Unit 32C and was analyzed for environmental effects in the EA. All trees that will need to be felled during harvest operations that are outside the unit boundary will be felled and left on site to meet CWD needs.

4 Road Work and Access

- Approximately 3,700 feet of new road will be constructed, an 850 feet decrease described in the EA and 690 feet of road reconstruction will occur. This decrease in road construction and inclusion in road reconstruction (not included in EA) was identified

after additional field reconnaissance indicated a portion of Road P5 will be located on an existing overgrown road.

- Total miles of existing roads to be renovated under BLM control to accommodate log-hauling will be 3 miles as described in the EA. Road renovation work will include brushing, blading, drainage structure improvement or replacement, and spot rocking at deficient locations. Thirty-two culverts will be replaced and/or installed, an increase of one culvert as described in the EA (Section 2.2.2.1).
- In addition, approximately 9,000 feet of existing road will be renovated, decommissioned and blocked to vehicular traffic after harvest operations. Drainage structure removal will occur on approximately 19 cross drains and/or stream crossings.
- Following harvest, all of the new construction and reconstruction will be decommissioned and blocked to vehicular traffic.

5. **Fuels Treatment:** Debris cleared during road construction will be scattered outside of the clearing limits and debris accumulation on landings and roads which are a result of yarding units 29A-29B, 32A-32D, 33A-33F, 5A and 5B will be machine piled, covered with polyethylene plastic and burned under favorable smoke dispersal conditions was included in the original EA. To further reduce the fire hazard after harvest operations are completed, some additional methods of fuel treatments are planned than originally included in the EA. These treatments will include:

- Light accumulations of debris created during road renovation or timber harvest operations along roads that will remain in drivable condition following the completion of the project will be scattered along the length of rights-of-way. Debris will be scattered far enough away from the road edge and in a manner that will minimize the chance of a fire starting in the debris.
- Larger accumulations of debris created during road renovation or timber harvest operations on landings and along roads that will remain in drivable condition following the completion of the project will be machine piled. In areas of heavy accumulation, at least 90% of the slash in the ¼" to 6" diameter range within 15 feet of the road edge will be piled for burning.
- Debris piles will be covered with plastic and later burned under favorable smoke dispersal conditions in the fall, in compliance with the State smoke management plan.

All design features and mitigation measures described in the EA (pp. 12 - 17) will be incorporated into the timber sale contract.

III. Compliance with Direction:

The analysis documented in the Parker Bear LSREnhancement EA is site-specific and supplements analyses found in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1994 (RMP/FEIS). This project has been designed to conform to the *Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*, May 1995 (RMP) and related documents which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Salem District (EA pp. 1 &-2). All of these documents may be reviewed at the Marys Peak Resource Area office.

Compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy

On March 30, 2007, the District Court, Western District of Washington, ruled adverse to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA-Fisheries) and USFS and BLM (Agencies) in *Pacific Coast Fed. of Fishermen's Assn. et al v. Natl. Marine Fisheries Service, et al and American Forest Resource Council*, Civ. No. 04-1299RSM (W.D. Wash)(PCFFA IV). Based on violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Court set aside:

- the USFWS Biological Opinion (March 18, 2004),
- the NOAA-Fisheries Biological Opinion for the ACS Amendment (March 19, 2004),
- the ACS Amendment Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) (October 2003), and
- the ACS Amendment adopted by the Record of Decision dated March 22, 2004.

Previously, in *Pacific Coast Fed. Of Fishermen's Assn. v. Natl. Marine Fisheries Service*, 265 F.3d 1028 (9th Cir. 2001)(*PCFFA II*), the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that because the evaluation of a project's consistency with the long-term, watershed level ACS objectives could overlook short-term, site-scale effects that could have serious consequences to a listed species, these short-term, site-scale effects must be considered. The following paragraphs show how the Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 meets the Aquatic Conservation Strategy in the context of PCFFA IV and PCFFA II.

Existing Watershed Condition

The Parker Bear LSR Enhancement project area is in the 82,000-acre Upper Alsea River 5th field watershed which drains into the Alsea River. The North Fork Alsea River Watershed Analysis (1996) describes the events that contributed to the current condition such as early hunting/gathering by aboriginal inhabitants, road building, agriculture, wildfire, and timber harvest.

Fifty-one percent of the Upper Alsea River watershed is managed by BLM, 47% is private and 1% is managed by the Forest Service. Late seral and old-growth (greater than 80 years old) forests comprise 37 percent of federal ownership in the watershed. We can infer then, that commercial harvest, stand replacement fire and development by human has occurred on 63% of the lands in the watershed since post Post-Euro-American settlement. Approximately 27% of BLM managed lands are located in riparian areas (within 100 feet of a stream). The earliest harvests have regenerated and are progressing towards providing mature forest structure. Most of the private industrial lands have been and will continue to be moved from mid condition class to the early condition class.

A dominant hydrological feature in this watershed is the North Fork Alsea River. The North Fork Alsea River is a tributary to the Alsea River, which drains into Waldport, Oregon located on the central Oregon coast. Oregon Coastal coho Salmon inhabit the Alsea River downstream of the project units, and is not listed as 'threatened' under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Due to the distance from the project area, Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 will have no effect on these fish.

Review of Aquatic Conservation Strategy Compliance:

I have reviewed this analysis and have determined that the project meets the Aquatic Conservation Strategy in the context of PCFFA IV and PCFFA II [complies with the ACS on the project (site) scale]. The following is an update of how this project complies with the four components of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, originally documented in the EA, Table 12, p. 59. The project would comply with:

Component 1 – Riparian Reserves: by maintaining canopy cover along all streams and wetlands would protect stream bank stability and water temperature. Riparian Reserve boundaries would be established consistent with direction from the *Salem District Resource Management Plan*. No new road construction would occur within Riparian Reserves;

Component 2 – Key Watershed: by establishing that the Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 is not within a key watershed;

Component 3 – Watershed Analysis: The North Fork Alsea River Watershed Analysis (1996) describes the events that contributed to the current condition such as early hunting/gathering by aboriginal inhabitants, mining, road building, agriculture, wildfire, and timber harvest. The following are watershed analysis findings that apply to or are components of this project:

- Evaluation of LSRs identified areas where density management treatments, which manipulate stand stocking levels, may be used to provide or enhance late successional forest ecosystem conditions. Density management of these stands can produce a stand that is more structurally diverse, has larger trees, more down woody material, and additional small openings. This creates more old-growth stand structure faster than when stands are left alone (p. 45).
- The N. F. Alsea watershed contains considerable LSR designated lands, primarily in the Upper Basin and Rugged Zones, where density management may be desirable for fish and wildlife objectives. The Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 is located in the Rugged Zone. Do density management on areas where benefit to fish and wildlife will be most beneficial (p. 118). Commercial thinnings on Matrix lands and density management on LSR lands should include measures to increase coarse woody debris (CWD) levels, such as topping or felling some selected trees that meet or exceed average stand diameters (p. 134). Density management opportunities in LSR should be focused at hastening the development of late successional forest conditions in the Upper Basin Zone and Rugged Zone (p. 135).

Component 4 – Watershed Restoration: by maintaining more than half of the canopy cover, implementing project design features to protect aquatic and riparian resources, and increasing structural diversity, the project would not preclude future restoration projects.

In addition I have reviewed this project against the ACS objectives at the project or site scale. Section 8.1.1 of the Parker Bear LSR Enhancement EA addressed the effects on the nine aquatic conservation strategy objectives at the project level, project/ site scale at the time of the original analysis. The project does not retard or prevent the attainment of Aquatic Conservation Objectives (ACSO) 1-9 (Table 14, EA pp. 66-70) because the project would:

- Maintain and enhance the diversity and complexity within Riparian Reserves by developing conditions for stand structure typically associated with older forests. (ACSO 1 and 2);

- Retain the ability of Riparian Reserves to function as refugia and connectivity for late successional, aquatic, and riparian dependent species (ACSO 1 and 2);
- Maintain stream channel stability (ACSO 3);
- Maintain current water quality conditions and trends in the long term (ACSO 4);
- Control sediment by maintaining stream protection zones, and using project design features that control erosion (ACSO 5);
- Maintain current stream flows by retaining more than half of the existing forest cover (ACSO 6);
- Maintain current stream channels, wetlands and ponds by maintaining streamside protection zones (ACSO 7);
- Maintain structural diversity by maintaining streamside protection zones. Thinning outside these zones is expected to increase understory development and structural diversity (ACSO 8);
- Maintain habitat for riparian dependent species and restore elements of structural diversity in Riparian Reserves (ACSO 9)

Unless otherwise specified, the No Action Alternative for the project would not prevent the attainment of any of the nine ACS objectives. Current conditions and trends would continue and are described in EA Section 2.4. Alternative 2 would also not prevent the attainment of the nine ACS Objectives as described in EA Section 8.1.1 (Table 14).

Survey and Manage Review

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is aware of the August 1, 2005, U.S. District Court order in Northwest Ecosystem Alliance et al. v. Rey et al. which found portions of the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines* (January, 2004) (EIS) inadequate. Subsequently in that case, on January 9, 2006, the Court ordered:

- set aside the 2004 Record of Decision *To Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines in Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern spotted Owl* (March, 2004) (2004 ROD) and
- reinstate the 2001 *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines* (January, 2001) (2001 ROD), including any amendments or modifications in effect as of March 21, 2004.

The BLM is also aware of the November 6, 2006, Ninth Circuit Court opinion in Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center et al. v. Boody et al., No. 06-35214 (CV 03-3124, District of Oregon). The court held that the 2001 and 2003 Annual Species Reviews (ASRs) regarding the red tree vole are invalid under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and concluded that the BLM's Cow Catcher and Cotton Snake timber sales violate federal law.

This court opinion is specifically directed toward the two sales challenged in this lawsuit. The BLM anticipates the case to be remanded to the District Court for an order granting relief in regard to those two sales. At this time, the ASR process itself has not been invalidated, nor have all the changes made by the 2001-2003 ASR processes been vacated or withdrawn, nor have species been reinstated to the Survey and Manage program, except for the red tree vole. The Court has not yet

specified what relief, such as an injunction, will be ordered in regard to the Ninth Circuit Court opinion. Injunctions for NEPA violations are common but not automatic.

We do not expect that the litigation over the Annual Species Review process in Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center et al. v. Boody et al will affect the project, because the development and design of this project exempt it from the Survey and Manage program. In Northwest Ecosystem Alliance et al. v. Rey et al the U.S. District Court modified its order on October 11, 2006, amending paragraph three of the January 9, 2006 injunction. This most recent order directs: "Defendants shall not authorize, allow, or permit to continue any logging or other ground-disturbing activities on projects to which the 2004 ROD applied unless such activities are in compliance with the 2001 ROD (as the 2001 ROD was amended or modified as of March 21, 2004), except that this order will not apply to:

- a. Thinning projects in stands younger than 80 years old;
- b. Replacing culverts on roads that are in use and part of the road system, and removing culverts if the road is temporary or to be decommissioned;
- c. Riparian and stream improvement projects where the riparian work is riparian planting, obtaining material for placing in-stream, and road or trail decommissioning; and where the stream improvement work is the placement large wood, channel and floodplain reconstruction, or removal of channel diversions; and
- d. The portions of project involving hazardous fuel treatments where prescribed fire is applied. Any portion of a hazardous fuel treatment project involving commercial logging will remain subject to the survey and management requirements except for thinning of stands younger than 80 years old under subparagraph a. of this paragraph."

BLM has reexamined the objectives of Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 as described in the (Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Environmental Assessment (Section 2.0). Project 1 will consist of density management of approximately 247 acres of 50 to 70 year old stands and culvert replacement and installation. For the foregoing reasons, it is my determination that the Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Environmental Assessment meets exemptions a and b above. Therefore, the decision to eliminate Survey and Manage is effective on this project.

IV. Alternatives Considered

Pursuant to Section 102 (2) (E) of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended), Federal agencies shall "Study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources." An unresolved conflict concerning alternative uses of available resources was identified between road construction activities and effects to water and soil resources. An alternative (Alternative 2) proposing a reduction of road construction and increased acres of density management (utilizing helicopter yarding) will meet the purpose and need of the project and address these conflicts. Complete descriptions of the effects of Alternative 1 (proposed action), Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 (No Action) are contained in the EA, pages 29-53.

V. Decision Rationale

Considering public comment, the content of the EA and supporting project record, the management recommendations contained in the *North Fork Alsea River Watershed Analyses*, and the management direction contained in the RMP, I have decided to implement Alternative 1, hereafter referred to as the selected action as described above. The following is my rationale for this decision.

1. The selected action:
 - Meets the purpose and need of the project (EA section 2.1), as shown in *Table 1*.
 - Complies with the *Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*, May 1995 (RMP) and related documents which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Salem District (EA pp. 8 & 9).
 - The Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 1 is in full and complete compliance with the 2001 Survey and Manage FSEIS and ROD, as modified by the 2003 Annual Species Review (ASR). This project is in compliance with Judge Marsha Pechman's January, 2006 ruling on the 2004 Record of Decision for Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines, as stated in Point (3) on page 14 of the January 9, 2006, Court order in Northwest Ecosystem Alliance et al. v. Rey et al. (DR Appendix B and C – Compliance with Survey and Manage Direction). No additional surveys are planned for the area as currently designed.
 - Will not have significant impact on the affected elements of the environment (EA FONSI pp. iii-v) beyond those already anticipated and addressed in the RMP EIS.
 - Has been adequately analyzed.

Table 1: Comparison of the Alternatives with Regard to the Purpose of and Need for Action (EA section 2.4.9)

Purpose and Need (EA section 2.1)	Alternative 1 229 ac-ground/skyline	Alternative 2 263 ac- helicopter/ground/skyline	No Action
1. Development of late-successional forest habitat (patch openings, clumps, coarse woody debris (CWD), retain remnants and limbs, snag creation and protection etc.).	Reduces stand densities to allow target conifers to increase diameter and height growth. Accelerate changes in some stand components to develop certain elements of diversity sooner by releasing understory conifers, and increasing large down wood and snags through density management.	Same as Alternative 1. An increase in treatment acres through helicopter yarding is proposed.	Does not meet the purpose and need. The most likely agent for this disturbance will be wind, which will create openings in patches. No substantial understory will develop within the next 30 years. Species diversity will take considerably longer to develop than if the proposed treatment were implemented as natural disturbance will be the agent for creation of stand structural diversity. Stand mortality due to competition will increase, resulting in increased amounts of small CWD, snags and instream LWD.
2. Increase structural diversity in relatively uniform conifer stands.	Reduces tree densities within stands to increase diameter growth and more open stand conditions to preserve limbs and high crown ratios. Increase species diversity and understory regeneration, shrubs, forbs, etc.	Same as in Alternative 1.	Does not meet purpose and need. See #1 above.

Purpose and Need (EA section 2.1)	Alternative 1 229 ac-ground/skyline	Alternative 2 263 ac- helicopter/ground/skyline	No Action
3. Increase growth of trees and improve the structural and spatial stand diversity in portions of Riparian Reserves.	Reduces stand densities to allow target conifers to increase diameter and height growth. Accelerate changes in some stand components to develop certain elements of diversity sooner by releasing understory conifers, and increasing large down wood and snags through density management. This in turn increases future potential of CWD and in-stream large wood sources.	Same as in Alternative 1 except would treat additional acres in portions of LSR and RR LUA's.	Does not meet purpose and need. Growth decreases over time, keeping diameters small thereby not meeting the need for large down wood and snags or large wood sources for streams.
4. Provides appropriate access for commercial harvest and silvicultural practices used to meet the objectives above, while minimizing increases in road densities.	Builds 3,700 feet of new roads and reconstructs 690 feet of existing road. Following harvest, all of the new road construction and reconstruction will be decommissioned and blocked to vehicular traffic. Approximately 9,000 feet of existing road will be renovated, decommissioned and blocked to vehicular traffic.	Builds 1,560 feet of new roads. Constructs 3 "helicopter" landings. Renovate 700 additional feet of existing road (12-7-33.1). Same as in Alternative 1 in other aspects.	No change. Maintain existing road densities.
	Will implement maintenance on feeder roads, allowing for continued access. Will also make needed improvements by minimizing road related runoff and sediment production.	Same as in Alternative 1.	Main routes will be maintained, however maintenance on feeder roads will be delayed resulting in increased road related runoff due to the risk of culverts plugging and failing over time.

2. Alternative 2 was not selected for the following reasons:

- Approximately 95 acres of density management areas would have required aerial (helicopter) yarding. We are aware that helicopter yarding is a viable tool to utilize in areas that are inaccessible to conventional harvesting methods, or are located within sensitive soil areas and to minimize road construction within close proximity to municipal water intakes. While some of the 95 acres are inaccessible to conventional harvesting methods, others could have been harvested after the construction of ridgetop roads.
- During the EA comment period, environmental groups (Friends of Marys Peak, ONRC, Coast Range Association) commented about thinning operations north of USFS Road #30 (portion of Unit 29A and entire Unit 29C). Their comments (Section VII Appendix A) centered on an objective to maintain the area in a natural state so that these areas could be included in a proposal to designate the area near Marys Peak as a "National Monument". A proposal to designate the area as a national monument is not within the scope of this project and authority. The above mentioned areas are currently being recommended for inclusion within an ACEC. The deferral of Unit 29C (28 acres) would have substantially reduced the amount of timber to be helicopter yarded. This reduction of timber would result in even higher helicopter logging costs (helicopter yarding costs tend to increase as the volume of timber to be helicopter yarded decreases). The savings from not constructing roads would have offset the additional cost of helicopter yarding, but there would still have been a considerable risk of the timber sale being economically unviable. In addition, the cost of helicopter

yarding of relatively low-value timber (small size DBH western hemlock and Douglas-fir) would have been approximately double the cost of skyline yarding.

3. The No Action alternative was not selected because it does not meet the Purpose and Need directly, or delays the achievement of the Purpose and Need (*EA section 2.1*), as shown in *Table 1*.

VI. Public Involvement/Consultation/Coordination

Public Scoping:

- A scoping letter, dated September 9, 2003, was sent to 24 potentially affected and/or interested individuals, groups, and agencies. - One response was received during the scoping period
- A scoping letter, dated February 27, 2004, was sent to 24 potentially affected and/or interested individuals, groups, and agencies. - Four responses were received during the scoping period.
- A description of the project was included in the March, June, September, and December 2004 and March 2005 project updates to solicit comments on the proposed project.

EA and FONSI Comment Period and Comments:

The EA and/or notice of availability of the EA were mailed to approximately thirty-two agencies, individuals and organizations on June 16, 2005. A legal notice was placed in a local newspaper soliciting public input on the action from June 16 to July 15, 2005. Seven comment letters [Oregon Natural Resources Council, Coast Range Association, Friends of Marys Peak, Douglas Pollock (Individual), Ted LaPage (Individual), Consumers Power Inc., Russel Inman, Jim Fairchild, (Individual)] were received. Responses to their comments can be found in Appendix A of the Decision Rationale.

Consultation/Coordination:

To address concerns for effects to listed wildlife species and potential modification of critical habitats, the Parker Bear LSREnhancement timber sale was submitted for Formal Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as provided in Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. Consultation for this selected action was facilitated by inclusion within a programmatic Biological Assessment (USDA-FS and USDI-BLM 2004b) that analyzed all projects that may modify the habitat of listed wildlife species on federal lands within the Northern Oregon Coast Range during fiscal years 2005 and 2006. The resulting Biological Opinion (reference #1-7-2005-F-0005; USDI-FWS 2004), concluded that this action will not result in jeopardy to listed species and will not adversely modify critical habitat for any species. This selected action has been designed to incorporate all appropriate design standards set forth in the Biological Assessment to ensure compliance with the Terms and Conditions included within the Biological Opinion.

The area where the selected action is located has two stream systems (Yew Creek and Parker Creek). Both provide habitat for Coastal coho Salmon (approximately two miles down stream from the project areas), which are not listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Protection of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as described by the Magnuson/Stevens Fisheries

Protection of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as described by the Magnuson/Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act and consultation with National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required for all projects which may adversely affect EFH of Coastal Coho Salmon. The proposed Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 1 is not expected to adversely affect EFH due to distance of all activities associated with the project from occupied habitat. Thus, no consultation with NOAA NMFS on EFH is required for this project.

VII. Conclusion

I have determined that change to the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI – June 2005) for the Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 1 is not necessary because I've considered and concur with information in the EA and FONSI. The comments on the EA were reviewed and no information was provided in the comments that lead me to believe the analysis, data or conclusions are in error or that the selected action needs to be altered. There are no significant new circumstances or facts relevant to the selected action or associated environmental effects that were not addressed in the EA.

Protests: In accordance with Forest Management Regulations at 43 CFR 5003.2, the decision for this timber sale will not become effective or be open to formal protest until the Notice of Sale is published "in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located". Protests of this sale must be filed within 15 days of the first publication of the notice. For this project, the Notice of Sale will be published in the *Gazette Times* newspaper on or around July 31, 2007. The planned sale date is August 29, 2007.

Contact Person: For additional information concerning this decision, contact Gary Humbard (503) 315-5981, Marys Peak Resource Area, Salem BLM, 1717 Fabry SE, Salem, Oregon 97306.

Approved by: Trish Wilson
Trish Wilson
Marys Peak Resource Area Field Manager

7/24/07
Date

VIII. Appendix A: Response to Public Comments Received on the Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 1 (EA#OR080-04-18)

Seven letters were received commenting on the Parker Bear LSREnhancement Environmental Assessment. Although the letters communicated a number of issues and opinions on forest management in general, the response to comments below only discusses those specifically directed to the Environmental Analysis which was made available for public review from June 16, 2005 to July 15, 2005. Comments are in *italics*. The BLM response follows each comment.

Oregon Natural Resources Council (ONRC), Doug Heiken Received July 13, 2005

1. Conserve roadless values

Drop the units in the un-inventoried roadless area (Units 29B and 29C) and grow the roadless area by closing more roads in NW corner of Section 32. The NWFP says that "perhaps 80% or more of late successional old-growth forest would probably have occurred as relatively large (>1,000 acres) connected forest. Units 29B and 29C will not result in benefits to roadless, LSR and Critical Habitat values. Scientific studies show the significant value of roadless areas smaller than 5,000 acres, and larger than 1,000 acres are currently rare on the landscape.

Response: When implemented, the Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 2 will decommission approximately 1 mile of existing road in Sections 31 and 32, further reducing road densities within the immediate vicinity. The NW corner of Section 32 is owned by Agency Creek Management Corporation and existing reciprocal right-of-way agreements prevents the ability to close additional roads within the immediate vicinity.

The decision to implement the Parker Bear LSREnhancement Project 1 as described in the selected action will defer the treatment of Unit 29C, decommission approximately 8,000 feet of existing road within Section 32 and decommission Road P1 thus maintaining LSR values and restoring roadless values.

Roadless values are addressed as part of our Wilderness inventory process. The area has been reviewed and found not suitable for inclusions as wilderness.

2. Maximize benefits for spotted owls

The agency should design thinnings to support abundant and diverse populations of owl prey species. Traditional thinning will reduce the recruitment of dead trees and down wood and further simplify the forest structure for many decades. Studies suggest that management can homogenize and simplify (reduce decadence, amounts of CWD, variety of tree species, diversity and abundance of understory vegetation, and spatial heterogeneity) forest ecosystems. Establishing diverse micro-habitats and creating and retaining large numbers of snags and down wood will help the spotted owl. Variable thinning will enhance the habitat for more than one prey species. If one prey species declines the owl has other options so diverse prey base tends to have a stabilizing effect on owl populations.

Response: The entire density management area will be thinned to a variable density (trees per acre ranging from 44 to 99). Thinning to the densities prescribed balances the need to open the stand sufficiently to allow for some understory development and tree growth while at the same time maintaining suitable northern spotted owl dispersal habitat and providing a source for down wood recruitment. Trees will be removed in a variable spacing; providing both openings for understory, tree/shrub development and areas of higher density. Understory development will be encouraged by planting mainly western hemlock and western red cedar within the patch openings and other appropriate areas and by releasing existing understory during CWD creation.

Coarse woody debris enhancement will be achieved by following strategy #2 as described in the *Late Successional Reserve Assessment for Oregon's Southern Coast Range* (1997). Existing snags and CWD will be reserved, except within road rights of way, yarding corridors/skid trails or for safety reasons. The general goal is to balance both long-term and short-term needs for CWD by adding some new material now and to let residual trees grow larger for future CWD recruitment. Trees to be utilized for snag/down log creation will be stand average or larger Diameter Breast Height outside Bark (DBHOB). At least 2 green trees/acre intended to be part of the residual stand will be felled/topped for CWD creation following harvest operations. Within the density management areas any green trees intended to be part of the residual stand that are incidentally felled to facilitate access and operability (yarding corridors, hang-ups, tailholds) will be treated as follows: Trees that are 20 inches (DBHOB) or greater will be retained on site. Trees less than 20 inches DBHOB will be available for removal. Incidentally felled trees or topped trees (ie. tailtrees, intermediate supports, guyline anchors) that are left by harvest operations will first be counted toward this target. Specific design features for Unit 29B will include the creation of up to 3 to 6 gaps that are 1/4 to 1/2 acre in size (totaling no more than 2 acres), where each gap will retain up to 20 green trees and some or all of these trees might be utilized for the creation of snags or down logs.

3. Manage for decadence. Drop units with lots of existing snags. Don't "capture mortality," rather take some and leave more. Retain trees damaged by wind, ice storms, disease, bears, etc.

A paper by Andy Carey describes a high level of complexity that is not fully represented in the EA. The BLM should recognize insects and disease such as bark beetles to be natural and beneficial parts of the forest. They are native species that help further thin the stand, and help feed other organisms. Unit 29B is advancing towards late successional conditions (33 snags/acre averaging 27" DBHOB). The agency must carefully design the project to keep workers away from existing snags. Harvesting down to 40 trees/acre will be too aggressive and will require most of those valuable snags to be cut. Units 29 AB&C, 32C, 33E, all appear to have high levels of existing snags. Logging these stands will mean that large numbers of these existing snags will need to be cut down for worker safety. The value of these snags in terms of supporting LSR functions (cavity nesting birds and mammals, spotted owl prey etc.) must be balanced against the interest in "growing big trees faster." The prescription should explicitly protect damaged and decadent trees such as those with forked tops, broken tops, leaning, wolf trees, heart rot, etc.

Response: We agree that insects and disease are natural beneficial elements of healthy forests, however, we also realize that large infestations of Douglas-fir bark beetles can jeopardize overall forest health and ultimately prevent the acceleration of late successional forest conditions. The document: *Generation of coarse woody debris and guidelines for reducing the risk of adverse impacts by Douglas-fir beetle* (Hostetler, B. and D. Ross) provides guidelines to be followed to

reduce the probability of Douglas-fir bark beetle caused mortality in residual standing trees in westside forests where live Douglas-fir are being cut for CWD creation.

We agree that large diameter snags are important legacy features that should be retained in treatment units, and we understand your concern that safety/operational issues should not diminish these structures. We believe the design features for the protection of existing down logs and snags as stated in the EA (page 16) provides the necessary protection for these resources and removes any incentive for needlessly felling or removing them. Except for Unit 29B, three of the units you cited for high levels of snags are generally small in acreage. Fire history, salvage harvests and previous precommercial thinnings all play a role in some snag retention.

We reviewed in the field one of our recently completed projects (Little Boulder Thinning) with former and current ONRC representatives (Jeremy Hall and Chandra LeGue) during the summer of 2005 where retention of larger diameter snags was accomplished without significant loss to this important resource. This project's success in retaining large diameter snags is not unique, as it has been our fairly extensive experience that the loss of large diameter snags for operational/safety reasons rarely happens in our units, but is occasionally necessary in close proximity to roads, landings, and yarding corridors/skid trails.

Trees with complex structures (forked or dead tops, deformed trees etc.) will be favored to leave for future cavity nesters and for structural diversity.

You stated your concern about Unit 29B already advancing towards late successional conditions. We quote from an abstract on density management as a means of hastening development of northern spotted owl habitat, *"explore a range of management scenarios for young Douglas-fir stands (age class 50 years) and estimated which scenarios promoted the development of forest patches that emulate the species mix and diameter distributions at known spotted owl nest sites in the central Coast Ranges of Oregon. Our modeling indicates that without silvicultural intervention or natural disturbances, the young stands (170-247 trees per acre) investigated did not develop features associated with spotted owl nest sites within 160 year total stand age. Silvicultural simulations that modeled heavy thinnings at ages 50 and 80 years, followed by tree-planting and additional thinnings developed forest patches structurally similar to our sample of spotted owl nests."* West. J.Appl. For.20 (1):13-27.

Even when forest stands appear to be advancing towards late successional conditions, usually one or more interventions are needed (natural or by management) to keep trees healthy and growing. We use stand exam data, unit location in the landscape and other factors to aid us in the development of our prescription. Trees per acre is not the only indicator considered in a thinning decision, but basal area, relative density, diameter breast height, crown closures, stand canopy closures for example, all play a part in the decision of how much to thin. Reducing the number of stems seems necessary for continuation of tree growth to achieve some of the structural characteristics desired for wildlife. Reducing the basal area by 55% provides enough time for growth of trees and limbs before the canopy closes again. Otherwise, the overhead canopy will close sooner, and the lower limbs will be lost as well as some of the key structural components desired. Thinning to the densities prescribed (Silviculture report, pp. 2, 14) balances the need to open the stand sufficiently to allow for some understory development and tree growth while at the same time maintaining suitable northern spotted owl dispersal habitat and providing a source for down wood recruitment.

4. Variability must be a goal not an accident.

The thinning prescription for this project removed the middle cohort of trees and might result in variability but it will be more by accident than by intention. Uniform spacing basically sets up the need for future thinning that the agency may not have sufficient funding, capacity, and public support to accomplish. The benefits of variable density thinning include: creating a patchy variety of conditions of light, heat, wind, moisture, competitive stress, and hiding cover within the stand and the landscape; setting up the stand so that there are future “winners” and “losers” (the winners become big trees and the losers become snags and CWD).

Response: It is our goal to strive for variability. Variable thinning density can be implemented in different ways and each thinning regime offers different results dependent upon the current stand diversity, density, history and species composition. Development of alternative approaches for achieving and maintaining various structures and patterns at any given point in time is developed in conjunction with the wildlife biologist, Silviculturist, and other specialists. After the scoping period, a decision was made to implement a diameter limit prescription in the hope that it will create enough variable size clumps and gaps through harvest and post-harvest actions. The diameter limit prescription, due to random distribution of tree diameters, should lead to variable spacing. The variability of residual tree density is expected to produce variable openings, clumps or patches of low density as indicated by the prescription verification plots in Appendix E of the Silviculture and Riparian Reserve Report. In addition, some areas were identified for additional cutting for desirable openings where natural seedlings exist as well as areas marked for additional trees to be left. Furthermore, post harvest monitoring for CWD (Silviculture and Riparian Reserve Report pp.18-21, 29-30) five years from the harvest date will be conducted and could provide further opportunity for openings should there be a post harvest recommendation.

5. Avoid stimulating understory dominance by clonal species such as salal and Oregon grape. Understory monocultures are just as bad as overstory monocultures.

Under some conditions, conventional thinning is known to stimulate dense uniform understories dominated by clonal species such as salal and Oregon grape. While these species have a role to play in understory plant communities, they should not dominate and exclude other aspects of vegetative diversity, especially from deciduous shrubs such as ocean spray, hazel, vine maple, yew, ninebark, mock orange, currant, huckleberry, etc. The conditions appear to be ripe for clonal dominance in this project area, so the BLM should take steps to avoid minimizing this problem. By using skips and gaps and a variety of within-stand thinning densities, the microclimate can be varied to support a wider variety of understory plants.

Response: Moderate to heavy thinning can provide opportunity in the short term for the understory to respond to the increased level of sunlight for growth. Typically 10-15 years is all the time the understory has until the overhead canopy closes in again shading them out. Just about any understory species will benefit from the increased light levels. However, variable density thins will create pockets of opportunities for growth to various degrees. Even variable density thinning can't totally avoid stimulation of understory clonal species growth.

6. Survey for red tree vole and protect nest sites.

RTV disclosure and protection is required by NEPA and ESA. The agency cannot make an informed decision on how this project affects spotted owl survival and recovery without knowing if red tree vole population may be affected by this project. We urge the BLM to fulfill the NEPA mandate for informed decision-making by surveying for red tree vole, and we urge the agency to fulfill the ESA mandate to conserve spotted owls by buffering and protecting red tree voles sites

Response: In the Salem District, pre-disturbance surveys are required for red tree voles in the North Mesic Zone which is not within the project area. This project area lies within the Upper Alsea River Watershed, which is in the Mesic Zone portion of the red tree vole range. The 2001 Survey and Manage ROD, as amended by the 2003 Annual Species Review, does not require pre-project surveys nor protection of known sites of red tree voles in this portion of their range. Red tree voles have been found to be common and well distributed within late-seral forests (their suitable habitat) in the Mesic Zone portion of their range. Red tree voles are occasionally found in mid-seral forests, especially if these forests are adjacent to patches of late-seral forests. The red tree vole Survey Protocol suggests that: "... these younger forests are most likely population sinks rather than sources (Carey 1991) and are unlikely to provide population persistence of red tree voles over the long term." (see: IM-OR-2003-003, Protocol Revisions to the "Survey Protocol for the Red Tree Vole", Version 2.1. October 23, 2002. BLM-Oregon State Office). The Parker-Bear EA (page 47) discloses that red tree voles may occupy the mid-seral stands including portions of the proposed units. But because: (1) these younger forests are do not likely contribute to population persistence, (2) the effects to tree crown disturbance are anticipated to be short-term (less than 10 years) with enhanced canopy structure developing in the long-term (10 years or more), and (3) the proposed treatments will not affect suitable red tree vole habitat nor spotted owl habitat, we believe that the selected action will have no effect on the quality of spotted owl habitat in this vicinity, and will not contribute to the need to list the red tree vole.

7. Avoid and minimize road construction.

Nothing is worse for sensitive wildlife than a road. Over the last few decades, studies in a variety of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems have demonstrated that many of the most pervasive threats to biological diversity - habitat destruction and fragmentation, edge effects, exotic species invasions, pollution, and overhunting - are aggravated by roads. The agency lacks the funds to maintain existing roads, so it is arbitrary and capricious to build more. Road construction and timber harvest can result in measurable reductions in water quality. The spread of both native and exotic pests and pathogens in many forest systems can be linked to the ready travel corridors provided by extensive road networks.

Response: All new road construction will be decommissioned and blocked to vehicular traffic following harvest operations. Best Management Practices will be followed during road construction to reduce the risk of adverse effects to aquatic resources. Road construction will not occur on steep, unstable slopes where the potential for mass wasting adjacent to stream reaches is high. Therefore, increases in sediment delivery to streams due to mass wasting will be unlikely to result from this action. Potential impacts resulting from road construction will be mitigated to reduce the potential for measurable sediment delivery to streams by implementing stream and wetland no-treatment buffers, minimum road widths, minimal excavation, ensuring appropriate

drainage from road sites.

There is a paucity of data in the scientific literature concerning specific cause-effect impacts of logging roads on terrestrial wildlife species in the central Oregon Coast Range. The most significant impacts roads appear to have on wildlife in the Coast Range are illegal hunting/fishing and garbage dumping. If these become a problem then the road(s) can be controlled or closed using several different options. The impacts logging roads have on terrestrial wildlife in the Marys Peak Resource Area are expected to be short-term due to high soil productivity, the diversity of fast-growing vegetation, the narrow road widths, and the overall low intensity of human use.

As noted in the EA (p. 31) grass seeding exposed soil areas tends to abate the establishment of noxious weeds. With the implementation of project design features, adverse effects from noxious weeds are not anticipated. The risk rating for the long-term establishment of noxious weed species and consequences of adverse effects on this project area is low.

Friends of Mary's Peak, Frank Hall
Received July 16, 2005

8. Extend the EA public comment period. Conduct a public information meeting to educate the public and answer their questions.

The Parker Bear project is located in what many hope will be a future park or national monument. If this project is to go forward without significant public opposition, more time needs to be allowed to gain public awareness, understanding, feedback and confidence in this project

Response: The public had ample opportunity, commensurate with their level of interest, to be involved in the various phases of project development in the past 8 years, by providing scoping comments, by participating in tours, as well as by making formal comments on the EA. Given this fact, I decided to not extend the comment period beyond the original July 15, 2005 date. The proposal of a future park or national monument is beyond the scope of this EA. The issue of a proposed park or national monument will be better raised during the planned revision of BLM's Resource Management Plan.

9. There are some benefits to this project and should proceed with modifications

Increase the variability of the thinning, greatly reduce the number stems thinned per acre and use girdling and other means of creating decadence that leave standing snags without requiring trees to be cut or removed. EA alternatives are so linked to timber production that more appropriate and moderate means of variable density treatment is not properly considered.

Response: Thinning to the densities prescribed (Silviculture report, pp. 2, 14) balances the need to open the stand sufficiently to allow for some understory development and tree growth while at the same time maintaining suitable northern spotted owl dispersal habitat and providing a source for down wood recruitment. Early in the scoping process, many means of density treatments were discussed dependent upon feedback from within our interdisciplinary team as well as outside of the agency at that point in time. Since the projects inception, the original prescription for diameter cut limit was our first attempt to increase variability within and among the stands. The wildlife biologist and silviculturist designed guidelines to help benefit wildlife habitat needs while

monitoring for coarse woody levels. For example, there are guidelines to retain green trees felled during harvest operations (facilitate access and operability) to create immediate CWD. Typically, all tailtrees used during skyline yarding operations are topped and/or girdled and left after harvest operations, creating immediate snags. Dependent upon the CWD monitoring and recommendations five years post harvest, girdling among other methods will certainly be an option for creating additional snags or larger down wood. The trees will be larger in size due to additional growth for future snags and down wood.

10. Minimize road construction and drop units 29B and 29C.

Drop all units that require road building off of road USFS #30. Enhance the roadless experience in this area and use leave behind thinning and limited intentional variable thinning without creating stumps in these areas.

Response: Unit 29C will be deferred by the decision to implement the selected action as described in this Decision Rationale. The construction, decommissioning and blocking of Roads P1 and P4 (approx. 500 feet) will allow the enhancement of approximately 18 acres of 50 to 66 year old stands through density management and CWD creation. To reduce visual impacts, an additional amount of trees adjacent to USFS Road 30 will be left within Units 29A and 29B than the remaining portion of the units.

**Coast Range Association (CRA), Chuck Willer
Received July 18, 2005**

11. Increase in-stand variability treatments

Need to improve the variable density treatments by reviewing the PNW research station work at Fort Lewis for specific silviculture treatments.

Response: Getting information from Pacific Northwest research station in Ft. Lewis is one of many resources we utilize to keep ourselves updated. Not all researchers, organizations or the public agree as a united entity on how best to approach treatments. While a wide variety of tools are available, many other factors play a role toward choosing a methodology on the ground. We do make an attempt to keep ourselves informed as much as possible on research updates and findings although our approach may not be what is desired by others.

**Douglas Pollock (Individual)
Received July 14, 2005**

12. Extend the EA public comment period.

I learned about the Parker Bear sale through a local environmental group and Gazette Times article a week before the EA input deadline. The lack of publicity and short deadline for comment leave the perception that you are trying to slide the timber sale under the public's nose.

Response: Addressed in response # 8. .

13. Long-term research to show that thinning can create "old growth" forests.

I would bet there are not any scientific studies older than a few decades indicating logging creates old growth forests. Old growth forests take hundreds of years to develop.

Response: By “old-growth” forests, we assume you mean any trees over 200 years of age. Old growth forests can indeed take more or less hundred(s) of years to develop and many of them lead different pathways in reaching that status at various ages. As far as long-term studies being decades old, the one we are aware of is the Black Rock Forest Management Research Area with the Oregon Department of Forestry. Research activities began on the forest with commercial thinning tests around 1952 when the stand was 43 years old. This study has been ongoing for 53 years (stands now 92 yrs old) and many of the treatments are still being tracked. The study consists of three thinning treatments (light, moderate, heavy) in addition to the control. It is unique in what it can contribute to our understanding of stand development and future forest conditions. It is an important guide in managing our forests in western Oregon to achieve desired future conditions. Several studies that have recently come out since 1997, (Tapeiner, Poage, Oliver) was on how old-growth stands developed. Such research supports a particular need for density management if the objective is to grow stands with old-growth characteristics. A study (Poage, 2001) found that diameter of old-growth trees at 100-300 years was closely related to diameter at 50 years of age. Many of the stands that were created for timber production sometimes need multiple treatments for development of late-successional characteristics.

14. Thinning and harvest will impact spotted owls and other threatened species in the short and medium term.

With spotted owl numbers in decline you should keep all harvesting a long distance from mature timber.

Response: As stated in the EA (p.44) the implementation of the RMP does not require spotted owl surveys to be conducted for this project. However, extensive spotted owl surveys have been completed within the vicinity of the project area by BLM staff, federal research programs, and private timber companies. No spotted owl sites exist within or adjacent to any of the proposed units. A single spotted owl was detected in the late summer of 2003 within 0.25 mile of some units in Sections 32 and 33. Subsequent surveys in 2004 failed to locate any spotted owls in this vicinity. There is one active spotted owl site within 1.5 miles to the southeast of a few of the proposed units. All or portions of Units 33A, 33B, 32D, 32C, 5A, 5B (totaling 84 acres) fall within 1.5 miles of the 2004 nest site. The closest detection of these owls to the proposed units is about 0.9 miles south of unit 33A.

All of the proposed units are generally lacking in the structural components more often found in mature and old-growth forests (large old trees with suitable nesting structure, large snags and down logs, multiple canopy layers) which make up suitable habitat for spotted owls. The proposed treatment units are likely to function as dispersal habitat for owls because they do provide sub-canopy flying space and at least marginal quality foraging habitat.

15. Marys Peak is a jewel of nature, a place with very special value. Just let nature dominate and manage.

Marys Peak would be best off if it was just left alone. There are incredible biodiversity, recreation and spiritual values to a broad area around Marys Peak. If you wanted to show the general

public that you have changed your past management techniques, than you would protect the entire Marys Peak watershed.

Response: I agree that Marys Peak has outstanding natural features with special values. The actual distance from Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 to the crest of Marys Peak is approximately 1 air mile. As described in the EA (pp. 29-52) the natural and recreational values of Marys Peak will not be adversely affected by Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1.

Ted LaPage (Individual)

Received July 14, 2005

16. Concern about invasive plants (mainly Scotch broom) damaging the delicate and sensitive ecosystems near the top of the peak.

I've spent a considerable amount of time trying to keep invasive plants from damaging the sensitive ecosystem near the top of Marys Peak. These plants can be introduced by the equipment that will construct the new roads for the timber sale. Invasive plants can take years to eradicate and if not eradicated will spread for years as the seeds of scotch broom can remain viable up to 80 years.

Response: Marys Peak RA completed an "Integrated Non-Native Plant Management Plan" Environmental Assessment in 2003 and spent over \$60,000.00 the past year in weed management. The entire project area will be monitored for introduced vascular plant species. If any new populations of Oregon State listed noxious weed species are located, the sites will receive a high priority for eradication.

Consumers Power Inc., Russel Inman

Received July 13, 2005

17. Access to Powerline

Access to the powerline right-of-way would be reduced due to the decommissioning of a portion of Spur C and/or without the installation of a culvert near the south end of Unit 29A.

Response: Spur C is currently being used by four-wheel drive and OHV's thus causing environmental degradation. The preferred method for reducing the likelihood for this degradation to continue is to block Spur C at its junction with the USFS Road 30 and decommission the initial 800 feet south of the blocked location. Access to the powerline right-of-way will be allowed by utilizing Roads 12-7-32 and 12-7-33.2. To prevent further degradation, this route will require road improvements (approximately 2 culvert installations, rock placement and drain dip installations) and access will be regulated through the installation of a gate on Road 12-7-32.

Jim Fairchild, (Individual)

Received July 13, 2005

18. Need to address cumulative effects of multiple thinnings within the watershed

Cumulative effects need to be assessed due to a significant amount of thinning projects within a short time period especially in light of ongoing sedimentation issues in the North Fork Alsea

Watershed.

Response: A cumulative effects analysis, addressing the potential effects of timber harvest on peak flow events and potential sedimentation, was completed for Parker Bear LSR Enhancement Project 1 and is available in the NEPA file (*Cumulative Effects Analysis for the Parker Bear Thinning, 2004*). The analysis includes a map of all recent, current, and proposed harvests on BLM lands in Upper Alsea River 5th-field watershed.

A “level 1” analysis, using the Oregon Watershed Assessment Manual’s Analysis for Forest Hydrology determined the risk of peak flows from the proposed harvest to be “low”. The “Water Available for Runoff” (WAR) model (“level 2” analysis) was then used to predict the risk of increasing peak flows in the watershed based on cumulative harvest activities (recently harvested, proposed to be harvested, and “likely to be proposed for harvest”, both on public and private lands) in the watershed at present and during the next 10-years. The model predicted that, for normal storm events (of various recurrence intervals), no increases in peak flow relative to a theoretical full forest condition are expected under the selected action, in conjunction with other activities assumed in the ten-year scenario. For unusually large storm events, the model predicted an “indeterminate” rating; the percent change in risk exceeded the model standard of error, but was not high enough to prompt a bedload mobility analysis. This means that there *could* be a risk of increasing storm flow volume (even slightly) over the next ten years, under a maximum harvest scenario and with an unusually large storm event. However, removing the selected action from the analysis did not significantly change the results and because the selected action will retain the project area in a nearly “full forest” condition, it is unlikely to substantially contribute to peak flows in the watershed.

The “Disturbed WEPP” module (<http://fsweb.moscow.rmrs.fs.fed.us/fswepp>) was used to predict runoff and sediment yield due to timber harvest and yarding for the selected action, including treatment in Riparian Reserves. The model found no increase in the risk of surface erosion or sediment delivery from the selected action (values too small to be measurable).

19. There is a disconnect from meeting LSR and CHU objectives from harvest operations.

No reference in the EA that explains the biological or ecological rationale for removing trees within the stand.

Response: The EA on page 11 explains the Purpose and Need for this action and outlines the intended biological and ecological benefits of the selected action. This section of the EA provides references to both the *Late-Successional Reserve Assessment*, and the *North Fork Alsea Watershed Analysis*. These two documents, along with references listed in the Silviculture Prescription and the Wildlife Biological Evaluation (included in NEPA file), provide a more extensive basis for the biological and ecological rationale for this selected action. Also see response # 2 and 9.

20. Project would not decrease fire risk.

Westside fires are not dependent of large surface fuels and the proposed treatments will not remove the largest contributors to fire spread (fine fuels, damaged shrubs). Opening stand crowns allows lower fuel moistures to develop at the forest floor.

Response: In the short term the risk of a fire start will be higher due to the slash created by the

thinning. Historically the number of fires that have occurred in this area has been very low. Very little treatment of slash on commercial thinning areas has been done in the past in NW Oregon and there have been very few fires resulting from this practice. The proposed thinning area is slightly cooler and wetter than the average NW Oregon site. It is expected that initially the additional thinning slash will result in a small, acceptable increase in risk of a fire occurring in the area. Risk of a fire start in the untreated slash will be greatest during the first season following cutting, the period when needles dry out but remain attached. These highly flammable "red needles" generally fall off within one year and risk of a fire start greatly diminishes. Fire risk will continue to diminish as the area "greens up" with increased growth of understory vegetation, and as the fine twigs and branches in the slash begin to break down and accumulate on the soil surface. Past experience in the geographic area of this selected action, has shown that, in approximately 15 years, untreated slash will generally decompose to the point where it no longer contributes significantly to increased fire risk or resistance to control.

The general area in and around this project is not a high use recreation area for motorized vehicles (primary recreational use is hunting and hiking) so a primary ignition source (people with motorized vehicles) will not be a serious risk factor for a fire start.

Light accumulations of debris created during road renovation or timber harvest operations along roads that will remain in drivable condition following the completion of the project will be scattered along the length of rights-of-way. Debris will be scattered far enough away from the road edge and in a manner that will minimize the chance of a fire starting in the debris. In addition, larger accumulations of debris created during road renovation or timber harvest operations on landings and along roads that will remain in drivable condition following the completion of the project will be machine piled. In areas of heavy accumulation, at least 90% of the slash in the ¼" to 6" diameter range within 15 feet of the road edge will be piled for burning. Debris piles will be covered with plastic and later burned under favorable smoke dispersal conditions in the fall, in compliance with the State smoke management plan. Spot treatment of the highest risk slash along roads and on landings has been a fairly cost effective treatment used successfully on similar projects in the past and will be done on this project in order to reduce the most accessible concentrations of slash.

If a fire started under extremely dry and windy conditions during the first few years following thinning, the increased fuel loading of slash on the ground could result in high stand mortality due to crown scorch. However, the increase in the spacing between tree crowns will have the beneficial result of decreasing the long term potential for crown fire occurrence.

21. Creation of a Marys Peak Park

Project area includes consideration that supports the creation of a Marys Peak Park. Deliberations should formally include and make adjustments for this possibility.

Response: Addressed in response # 8.

22. Operations occur on steep ground and many in close proximity to streams. Operation will also significantly impact USFS use and have negative esthetic impacts

Encourage additional helicopter yarding (Units 33D, 32C and 5A) and defer harvest of Units 29B and 29C entirely and the portion of Unit 29A north of USFS Road #30.

Response: As noted in the decision rationale, we are aware that helicopter yarding is a viable tool to utilize in areas that are inaccessible to conventional harvesting methods, and/or are located within sensitive soil areas and to minimize road construction within close proximity to municipal water intakes. While some of the acres are inaccessible to conventional harvesting methods, others (Units 33D, 32C and 5A) can be harvested after the construction of ridgetop roads. In addition, the cost of helicopter yarding relatively low-value timber (small size DBH western hemlock and Douglas-fir) will be approximately double the cost of skyline yarding. The savings from not constructing roads will offset a small percent of the additional cost of helicopter yarding, and increase the risk of the timber sale being economically infeasible.

The decision to implement the selected action will defer the harvest of Unit 29C and the portion Unit 29A north of USFS Road 30. The enhancement of 16 acres of relatively young forest will be accomplished by treating Unit 29B.

Establishing stream protection zones (no-cut protection zone/no-cut buffer/no-treatment zone) adjacent to all project area streams will maintain canopy cover, water quality, and channel morphology.

Visual resource impacts to Unit 29B and the portion of Unit 29A south of USFS Road 30 will be minimized by retaining a higher density of trees adjacent to the road than the remaining portions of the units. The portion of Unit 29A north of USFS Road 30 will be deferred from treatment (proposed ACEC). In addition logging slash will be reduced through scattering and or piling and burning operations. As stated in the EA (p.51) a forest setting would still be maintained, and vegetation disturbed by logging activities would be expected to return within five years.

23. Favor intentional variable thinning

Favor retention of a variety of tree ages, sizes and species; damaged and defected; and hardwoods.

Response: See earlier response question #4.

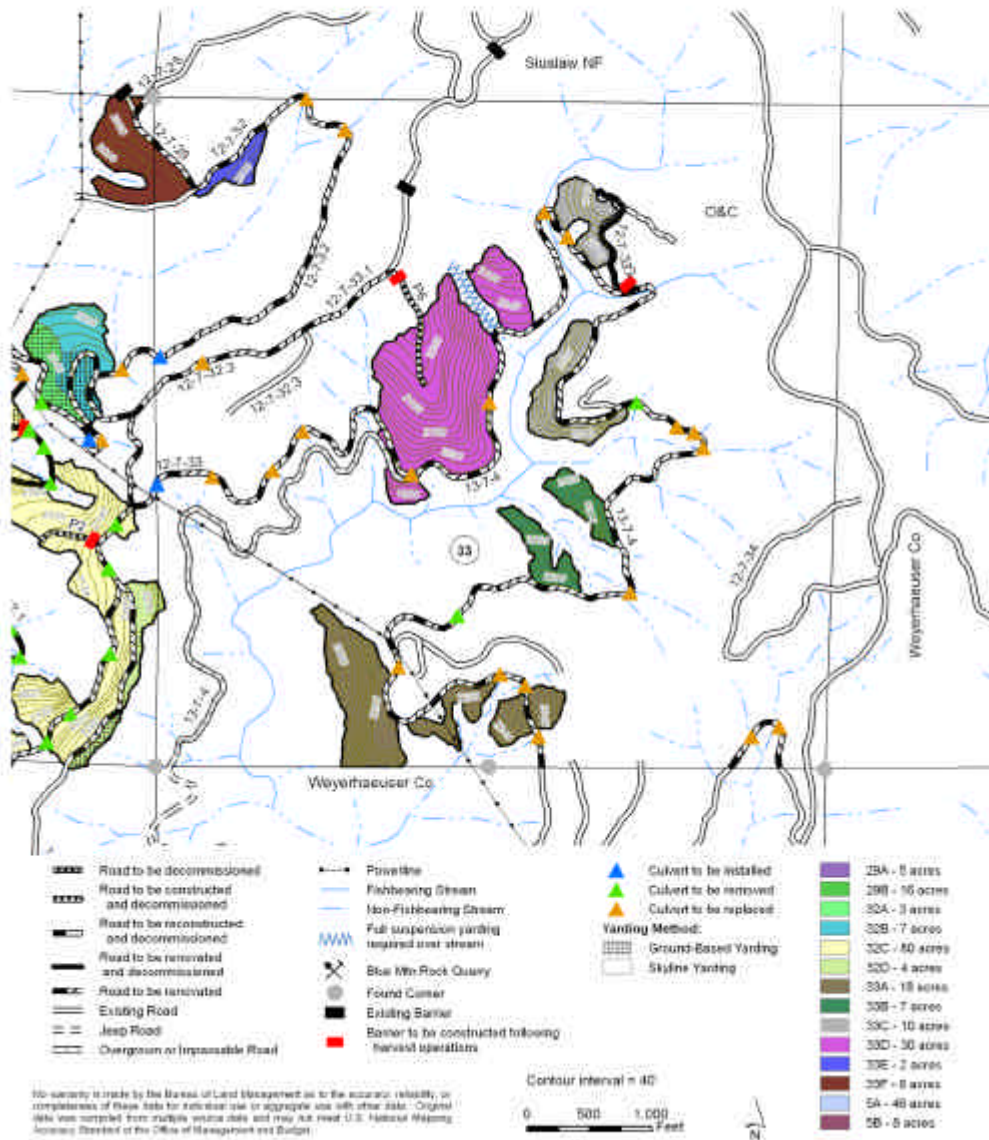
United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

PARKER BEAR LSR ENHANCEMENT

T. 12 S., R. 7 W., Section 33, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON

**Selected Action
(Units)**

Sheet 1 of 4



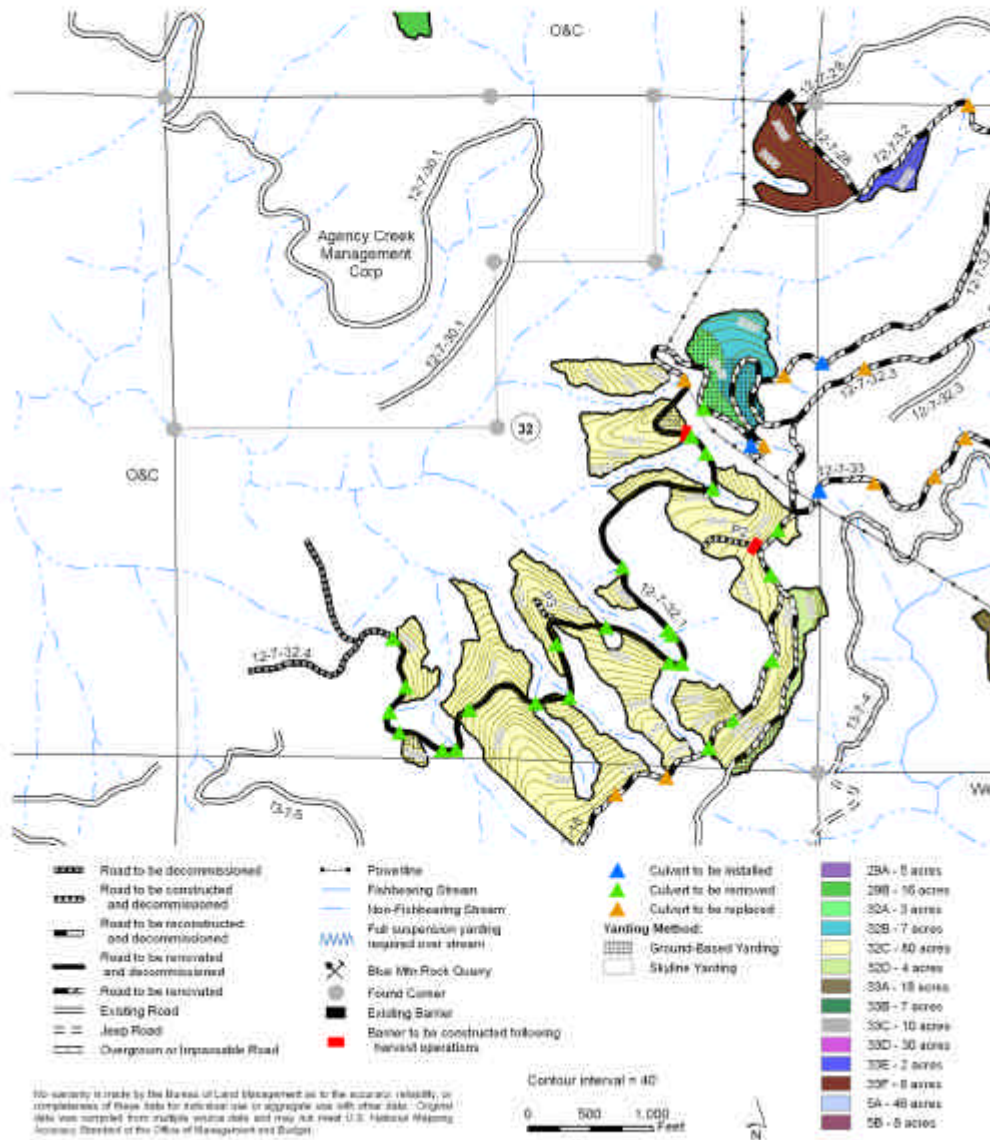
United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

PARKER BEAR LSR ENHANCEMENT

T. 12 S., R. 7 W., Section 32, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON

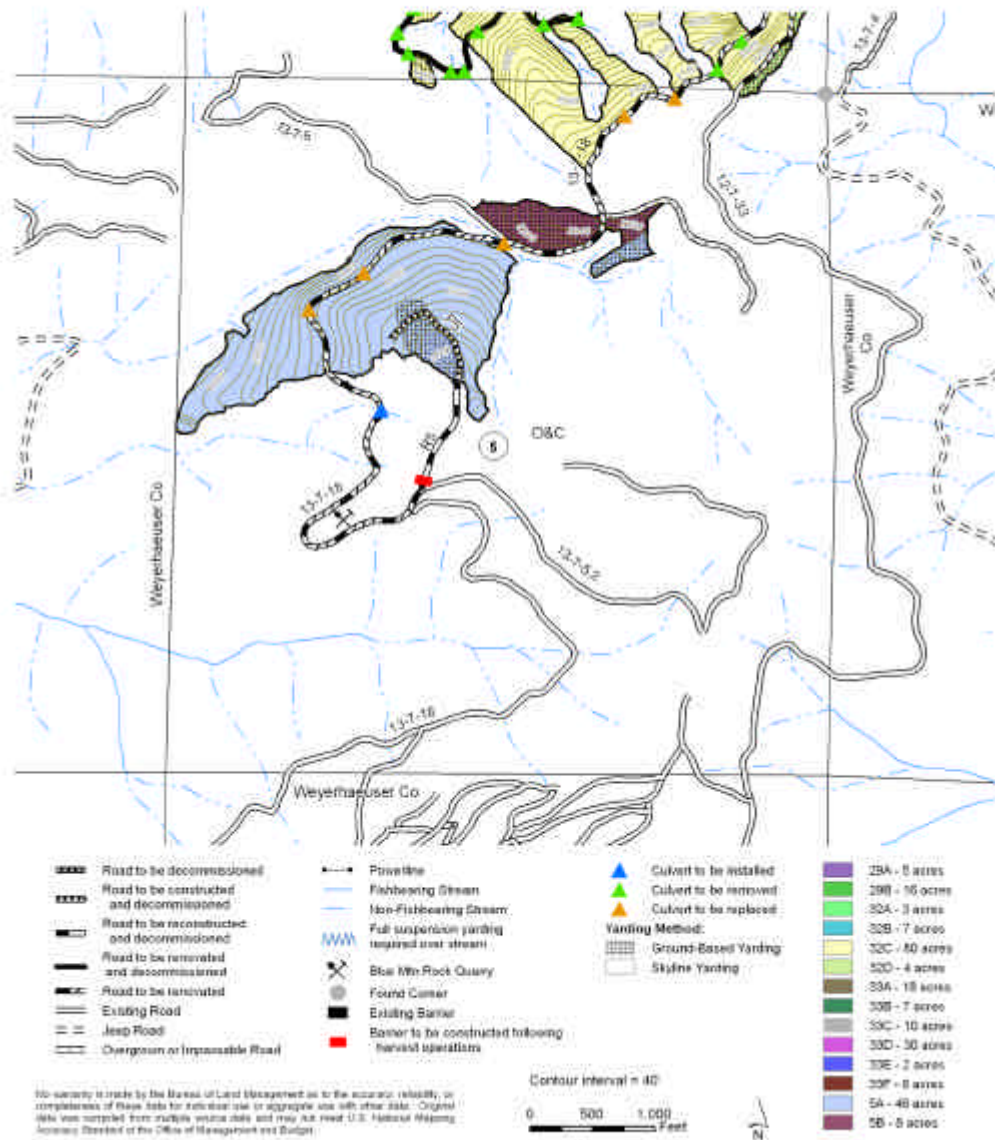
Selected Action
(Units)

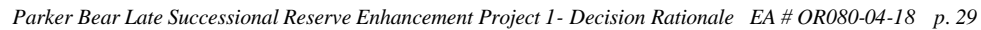
Sheet 2 of 4



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PARKER BEAR LSR ENHANCEMENT
T. 13 S., R. 7 W., Section 5, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON

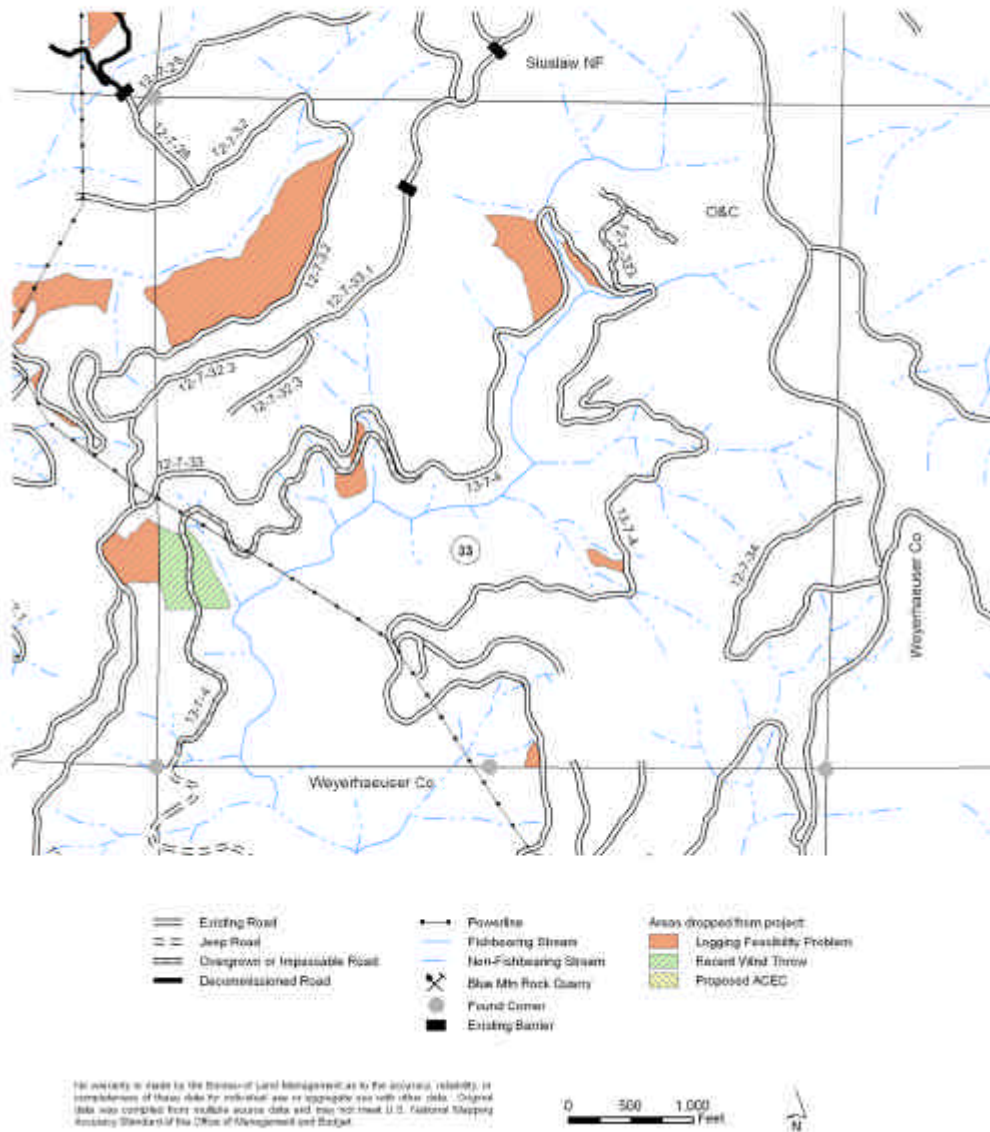
**Selected Action
(Units)**
Sheet 3 of 4





PARKER BEAR LSR ENHANCEMENT

T 12 S., R. 7 W., Section 33, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON



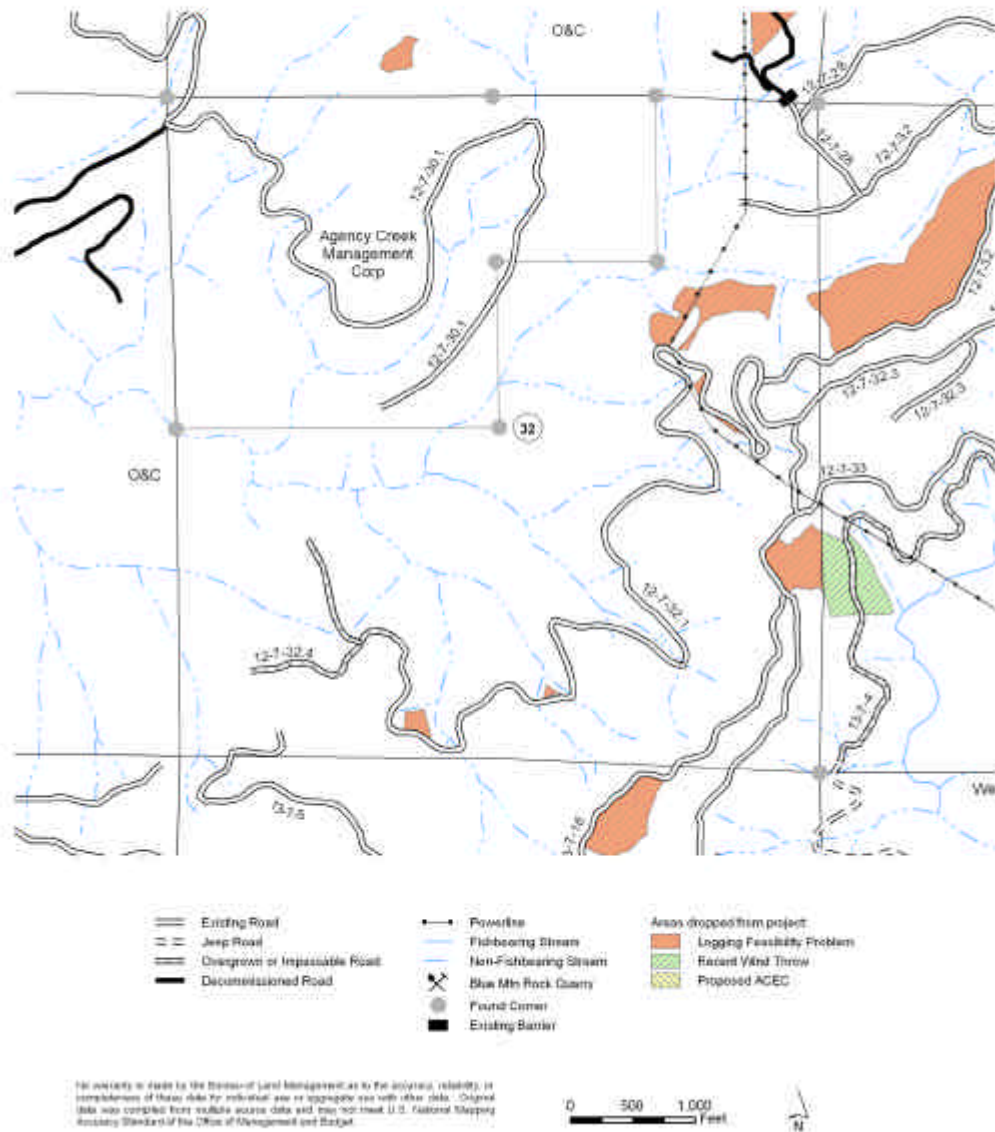
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PARKER BEAR LSR ENHANCEMENT

T. 12 S., R. 7 W., Section 32, W.M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON

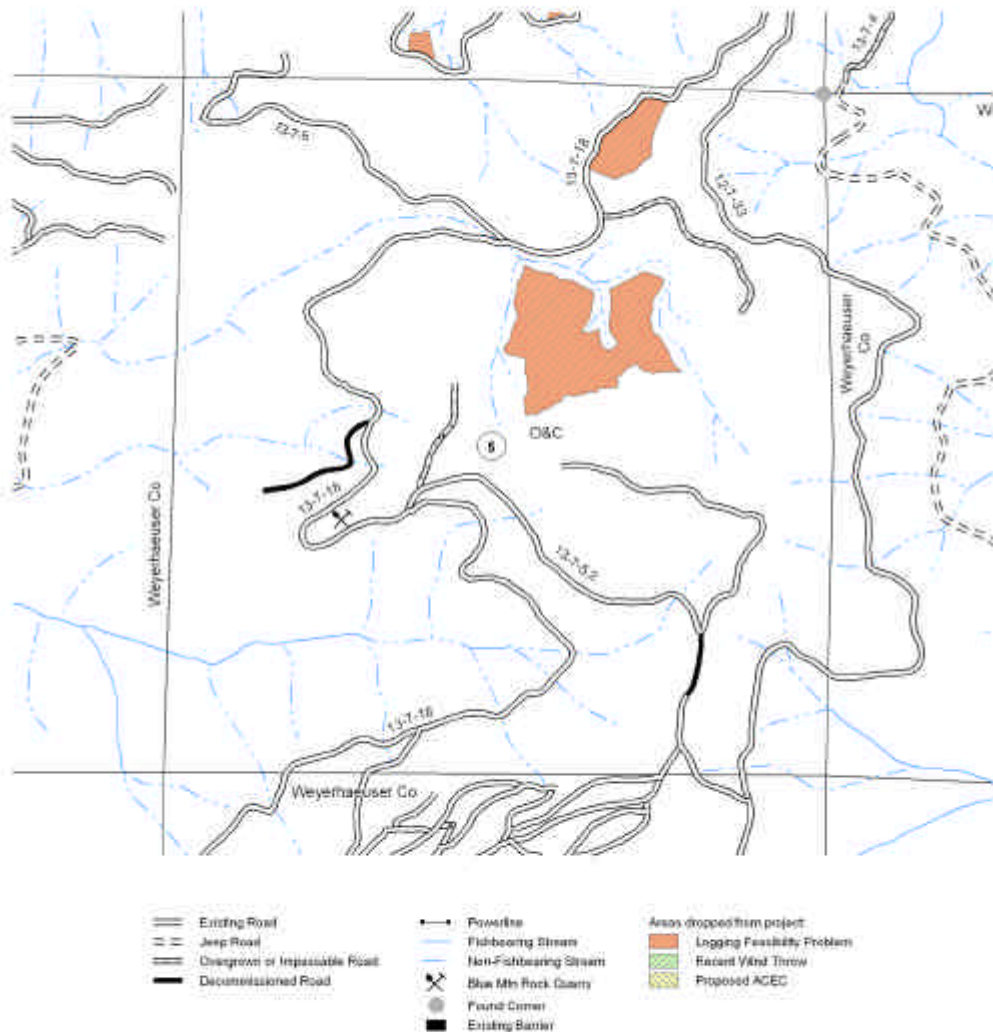
**Selected Action
(Dropped Areas)**

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0 500 1,000 Feet



